



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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SERVICE PROPOSES STREAMLINED PROCESS FOR STATES TO CONTROL RESIDENT CANADA GOOSE POPULATIONS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today proposed establishing a new permit to allow state wildlife agencies to deal with and control resident Canada goose populations that pose a threat to public health and safety or are damaging property.

Under the proposed new permit, between March 11 and August 31, states would not have to obtain individual permits from the Service each time they determined that a Canada goose control action was necessary, as is currently required. At other times of the year, states would still have to seek permits on a case-by-case basis to ensure these efforts do not interfere with effective regulation and monitoring of other Canada goose populations. The new permit would only be available to state wildlife agencies.

"Bolstered by plenty of habitat and a lack of natural predators, burgeoning populations of resident Canada geese increasingly are coming into conflict with people and property," said Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark. "This proposal gives state wildlife agencies the flexibility to manage these resident populations without having to get authorization from the Fish and Wildlife Service every time they decide to take action."

The new permits would contain a number of conditions. States, for example, would be able to use lethal means of controlling resident Canada goose populations only when alternative nonlethal means have proven ineffective or unfeasible. States also would have to set up the control actions in such a way that they are not actually a "hunt" and would have to dispose of killed birds in a proper way such as donating them to charities to provide food for homeless people.

Control efforts include harassment, culling, and trapping and relocating injurious flocks. States generally employ these means in areas where reducing populations through hunting is not possible.

The control actions would not be allowed if they affect any species listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act. In addition, in areas of California, Oregon, and Washington, the proposal would restrict lethal control activities to May 1 to August 31 to protect the threatened Aleutian Canada goose.

Wildlife agencies recognize and manage Canada geese by distinct populations. The majority of these populations nest in the Arctic and spend winter in the United States; however, several populations nest and reside in the temperate climates throughout the year and often are referred to as "resident." While "migratory" and "resident" birds look very similar and often intermingle, they rarely interbreed nor do birds often shift from one population to the other.

The proposal focuses on resident Canada geese that live year-round in the Lower 48 States. These locally breeding birds have settled onto golf courses, urban parks, corporate campuses, and other protected areas that offer excellent year-round habitat both low in predators and high in food supply.

The proposal was published in the March 31 Federal Register. The public may comment on the proposal in writing until June 1, 1998. Comments should be sent to Chief, Office of Migratory Bird Management, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA 22203.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 94 million acres of land and water comprised of 512 national wildlife refuges, 65 national fish hatcheries, 38 wetland management districts with waterfowl production areas, and 50 wildlife coordination areas.

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes Federal excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.

Questions and Answers
Proposed Rule: Special Canada Goose Permit

Question. What are resident Canada geese and how do they differ from other Canada geese?

Answer. There are currently 11 subspecies of Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) recognized in North America. For the most part, these populations nest in arctic and sub-arctic regions of Canada and Alaska and are encountered in the conterminous United States only during the fall, winter, and spring of the year or as a result of human placement. Two subspecies of Canada geese nest and reside predominately within the conterminous United States (*B.c. maxima* and *B.c. moffitti*), the "giant" and "western" Canada geese, respectively. No evidence currently exists documenting inter-breeding between Canada geese nesting within the conterminous United States and those subspecies nesting in northern Canada and Alaska. The geese nesting and residing within the conterminous United States in the months of June, July, and August are collectively referred to as "resident" Canada geese.

Question. What is the status of resident Canada goose populations?

Answer. Canada geese are among the most numerous and diverse of all waterfowl species in North America. Currently, breeding populations of Canada geese collectively exceed 4 million birds and are providing an annual sport harvest in the United States and Canada of approximately 1.5 million birds. Numbers of Canada geese breeding and residing within the Lower 48 States have increased dramatically during the past several decades. Currently, resident Canada goose populations in both the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways now exceed 1 million birds each and have increased an average of 17 percent and 6 percent per year, respectively, during the last 10 years. Numbers of resident Canada geese in the central and western portions of the country have shown similar growth rates during the past 10 years.

Question. What is this new permit and why has the Service proposed it?

Answer. As pointed out above, these resident Canada goose populations have increased significantly in recent years. As such, these growing populations are coming into increasing numbers of conflicts with human activities, causing damage to personal and public property and raising concerns related to health and human safety. To date, the Service has attempted to address this growing problem through existing annual hunting season-frameworks and issuance of control permits on a case-by-case basis. While this approach has provided relief in some

areas, the Service realizes that sport harvest will not completely address the problem and that the current permit-issuance system has become a time-consuming and burdensome process for both applicants and the Service.

Therefore, the Service is proposing to add a new permit option specifically for the management and control of resident Canada geese. The permit would be available to state conservation or wildlife management agencies on a state-specific basis. Under this permit, states and their designated agents could initiate resident goose damage management and control injury problems within the conditions/restrictions of the permit program. Such a permit would be restricted to the period between March 11 and August 31. This new special permit would increase the use and availability of control measures, decrease the number of injurious resident Canada geese in localized areas, have little impact on hunting or other recreation dependent on the availability of resident Canada geese, and allow injury/damage problems to be dealt with on the state/local level, thereby resulting in more responsive and timely control activities. The new special permit would further result in biologically sound and more cost-effective and efficient resident Canada goose damage management.

Question. Isn't the special Canada goose permit contrary to the protections afforded Canada geese by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act?

Answer. The MBTA provides strong measures for the protection and conservation of migratory birds (including resident Canada geese), while at the same time providing opportunities for people to use the resource for sport, recreation, and scientific endeavors. The MBTA also provides considerable flexibility for dealing with situations in which birds may come into conflict with human interests, such as those posed by the increasing numbers of resident Canada geese.

Question. Why isn't the existing procedure of issuing permits on a case-by-case basis adequate for dealing with resident Canada goose problems?

Answer. Because of the administrative procedures involved in the issuance of permits, there may be a lag time of several weeks between a state's request for a permit and its receipt of a permit authorizing a control action. In the interim, resident Canada geese can cause significant damage to personal property and economic losses. The new special Canada goose permit will allow states and their designated agents to conduct management activities as soon as it becomes apparent that resident Canada

geese are a problem. The new permit would also rely on a greater application of community standards and preferences by allowing judgments determining appropriate levels of control to be made at a more local level.

Question. Who are designated agents and what role do they have in the new permit?

Answer. Designated agents are, for the purposes of the permit, treated the same as employees of the state. The state wildlife management agency, as the permit holder, remains legally responsible for any and all control activities conducted under the permit.

Question. I am currently suffering damage and other economic losses due to resident Canada geese. Can I obtain one of these new permits?

Answer. No. The new special Canada goose permit is only available to state wildlife management agencies responsible for migratory bird management.

Question. Why was the special Canada goose permit limited to situations between March 11 to August 31?

Answer. Because resident Canada goose populations interact and overlap with other Canada goose populations during the fall and winter, these other goose populations could potentially be affected by any management action or program targeted at resident Canada goose populations during the fall and winter. Therefore, to avoid potential conflicts with existing Canada goose management plans on other Canada goose populations, the new special permit is restricted to the period March 11 through August 31 each year. These dates encompass the period when sport hunting is prohibited throughout the conterminous United States by the Migratory Bird Treaty (1916) and resulting regulations promulgated under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (1918). Injury/damage complaints occurring during the period September 1 to March 10, the period open to sport hunting, will continue to be addressed through either migratory bird hunting regulations or the existing migratory bird permit process.

Question. What effect will the special Canada goose permits have on resident Canada goose populations? What about other, migratory Canada goose populations?

Answer. Under the new permit, the Service expects that the use of resident Canada goose control and management activities, particularly lethal control methods such as egg/nest destruction and methods associated with hazing techniques of adult birds, would increase. However, following this initial increase, continual use of hazing methods should become more effective and may result in fewer overall lethal control activities. Such lethal and nonlethal activities would be expected to decrease the number of injurious resident Canada geese in local areas, especially urban/suburban areas. Regionally, little overall impact to the resident Canada goose population would be expected because many Canada goose populations have demonstrated the ability to sustain harvest rates in excess of 20 percent. It is anticipated that the magnitude of any lethal control activities will be well below 20 percent of any state's resident Canada goose breeding population. Because the new permit is restricted to the period of March 11 to August 31, the Service expects no impact on other Canada goose populations.

Question. What impact will the new special permit have on existing sport-hunting opportunities?

Answer. The Service expects little impact on sport hunting under the new special permit. Resident Canada goose populations in areas that are targeted for management/control activities are generally those that provide little or no sport-hunting opportunities due to restricted access within urban/suburban areas where hunting is either precluded or severely restricted. Areas and resident Canada goose populations already open to sport hunting would be expected to remain open, as special Canada goose season frameworks and guidelines would not change.

Question. Wouldn't a depredation order be a simpler, more cost-effective/efficient solution?

Answer. While the Service agrees that depredation orders in other circumstances have proven to be valuable tools in wildlife damage management, the Service believes that management of resident Canada geese deserves special attention and consideration that can best be provided by the new special permit. The Service believes that a special permit will provide the management flexibility needed to address this serious problem and at the same time simplify the procedures needed to administer this program. A special permit will satisfy the need for an efficient/cost-effective program while allowing the Service to maintain management control.

Question. Aren't non-lethal control techniques effective in reducing conflicts between resident Canada geese and people?

Answer. The Service also prefers nonlethal control activities, such as habitat modification, as the first means of eliminating resident Canada goose conflict/damage problems and has specified language to this effect in the proposed regulations. However, habitat modification and other harassment tactics do not always work satisfactorily and lethal methods are sometimes necessary to increase the effectiveness of nonlethal management methods.

While it is unlikely that all resident Canada goose/human conflicts can be eliminated in all urban settings, implementation of broad-scale resident Canada goose management activities may result in an overall reduced need for other management actions, such as large-scale goose round-ups and lethal control.

Question. Doesn't the new special permit discourage states from investing in non-lethal, long-term solutions to resident Canada geese?

Answer. The new special permit does not absolve states from the responsibility of employing non-lethal control techniques. It simply provides another tool for use in an integrated approach to reducing problems caused by resident Canada geese. The Service believe that the states share responsibility for reducing resident Canada goose problems and that the states should promote habitat management and other facilities that exclude or repel resident Canada geese, as well as the use of non-lethal deterrents.